

*Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better: Study of Females Working in a Male Dominated  
Industry*

**An Honors Thesis ( HONRS 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Pollard", with a stylized, cursive script.

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## **Abstract**

Women are a minority in the media industry. The positions the majority of females hold are associated with the female gender: hair stylists, costume designers, and make up artists. However, with Kathryn Bigelow's 2009 Best Director Oscar win, the lack of female involvement and the positions they hold have received increased attention. By focusing mainly on the question of why women are not equally employed in the business, I analyzed statistics, first-hand accounts, and personal experiences to help answer this question: are women a minority because of lack of confidence, lack of interest, or lack of opportunity?

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Under “American” ideals, we can all be what we want to be. For women and minorities, this dream hasn’t always been a reality. For females wanting to hold higher creative positions in the media industry such as directors, producers, and screenwriters, chances are limited: “In 2005, women comprised 17% of all directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors working on the top 250 domestic grossing films” ( “The Celluloid Ceiling” 1). Why are women underrepresented? Do they feel inferior to their male co-workers? Do they feel insecure about their abilities? Are they simply not interested in the higher power positions?

The answer is: none of the above. Studies cannot seem to place an accurate assumption as to why women are not given higher responsibility in the media field. However, there is one probable explanation: women are still given the “housewife” stereotype. “Attitudes about women as directors will change when attitudes about women in positions of power change” (Dawn 1). Even after the women’s rights movement, women are still considered to be intellectually inferior to men: they can’t handle the pressure or the responsibilities associated with these high profile occupations.

As with any job occupied by a female, there is a probability of time off. Studies have shown the women tend to take time off between projects:

But the continuing perception that women aren't the constant workhorses their male counterparts are has significant anecdotal evidence, including big-budget helmers like Nancy Meyers (who averages three years between projects) and Bigelow (whose last feature prior to "Locker" was in 2002). (Dawn 1)

Women may still have the mentality of being the caretakers of the family, whereas the males are the breadwinners; they may need a break to spend time with their families between projects.



Therefore, the differences in personality traits between men and women might also play a role in lack of women in the workplace.

Women are often given caring traits: compassion and honesty--a blessing and curse. Films created by women may take longer to make because they want it to be emotionally appealing and personal. Nora Ephron, a successful director, states:

Most men don't want to direct movies that aren't about them...well...most directors don't want to direct movies that aren't about them cuz it takes a long time and you have to find some way of making it feel personal." ("Nora Ephron: Most men don't want to direct movies that aren't")

Because of women's sensitivity, they may be more willing to take time to research characters to get the most out of the audience's emotions. They are more patient in discovering how to make the film personal. The more passionate a director is about the film, the more time they are willing to spend on it. Men and women might function differently in finding their personality imprint on a particular film.

In addition, this may account for why women directors are primarily known for their work on romantic comedies, documentaries, or dramas. According to 2005 statistics researched by Martha M. Lauzen:

Women comprised 29% of individuals working on documentaries, followed by 27% on romantic comedies, 23% on romantic dramas, 20% on comedy/dramas, 19% on dramas, 14% on comedies and science fiction/fantasy features, 13% on action and animated features, and 8% on horror features. ("The Celluloid Ceiling" 1)

These genres focus on emotional appeals and feelings associated with women, such as romance. Female directors can relate to the more sensitive emotions than the more "manly" emotions

relative to the action or horror movies male directors seem to create. Only nine of the top fifty films of 2009 focused on women (“Factoid” 1). Who knows a woman better than a woman? If making movies personal is an aspect of determining whether a director, male or female, takes on a project, stereotypically, women would have a more personal connection to the feelings utilized with more “tearjerker” films whereas men would have a more personal connection to the plots of action or horror films.

Furthermore, women have shown to have better ability to multi-task than males. Of all the higher creative positions, women tend to concentrate on being producers. Thirty-three percent of women are producers—the highest percentage of female production jobs (“Independent Women” 1). The amount of responsibility for producers all depends on the ability to focus on different aspects of production all at once. Even though that means sixty-seven percent of producers are males, women have a personality advantage that allows them to gravitate towards this production job.

In order for women to receive recognition as successful specialists in their craft, gender shouldn’t be incorporated into the title. When someone says director, he/she doesn’t say male director, but when establishing it’s a female director, people place “female” in front; the point being a director is a director, it shouldn’t matter what gender. Nora Ephron and Kathryn Bigelow (both successful directors) refuse to go by the term female director. When asked why she does not call herself a female director, she says:

“It’s a way of marginalizing you...successful woman director. The truth is I’ve had some success in the movie business; I’m a successful director. The minute they say oh...chick flick, it’s a way of taking a movie and saying it’s only for a girl...reducing it. The movies I make men like to come to also, that’s what’s depressing about it, they put you in



a category instead of saying we're all in the movie business.” (“I’m a successful director: Nora Ephron”)

When we keep acknowledging the gender in positions, women will not be classified in the same category as their male counterparts. In film, it is seen as a bigger accomplishment for females to be deemed successful in their craft because of the lack of women involvement. But until people start accepting the females can play on the same level as the “big boys,” there will always be a gender gap in the media industry.

However, I have my own theory as to why women are underrepresented in the industry: insecurity. I created my video based on this premise. Through my experience as a production major, I have witnessed girls’ insecurities about showing projects in class. Talkative, outgoing girls become quiet when placed in groups with male peers. In my experience, girls have different views on projects the group should create.

Personally, I am quiet and shy, and I become extremely introverted once I stepped foot into a production class. Looking around, I was one of the few girls. Whenever paired with a group, I shut my mouth and did whatever projects the boys wanted to do, which often involved their own interpretations of the recent zombie phenomenon. My style is more romantic-comedy, because it is more relatable to me.

However, I felt too inferior to the males to express my opinion. I know that I am not the only female in this position. By creating a video utilizing an all female crew, my goal was to help increase girls’ confidence in their production skills; I was trying to create an atmosphere where girls would be free of bias and judgment based on their “different” opinions for video subjects. They’d be able to write, direct, produce a film that they found more relatable to their own personal style.

Having primarily focused on editing throughout my production classes, I never got the chance to direct. This project helped expand my knowledge of the different crew positions available on a film shoot; I was learning with the rest of the crew. A director is the “boss” of the production, and during this shoot, I realized I hate being the boss. I do not like telling people what to do, or the negative reputation I might receive if I am too aggressive in my directions.

This thought may be another reason there are so few female directors--women tend to care too much about what others think of them. They might let actors finish their conversations before calling “action” in order to appear polite for fear of interrupting; this puts everyone behind schedule and costs money. Directors need to be assertive and if one is too concerned about other’s feelings, the job will not get done.

To start the film, I placed a statistic about the lack of women in higher creative positions in Hollywood. Following this, the words “It’s time to change.” This sets up the principle of the film – how to increase the role of women in media.

My main goal was to show that sometimes we have to step out of our comfort zones to get what we want. By taking a simple step of volunteering to show her project, she became an award-winning director much easier than her alternate shy self, who got as far as an audience member of the awards show. The best way to demonstrate the alternate stories was to do a split-screen, show two videos on the same screen; the left side would show the results of her risk, and the right would express her outcome if she stayed shy. This way the different outcomes appeared on one screen instead of having one right after the other; the organization of the clips was more fluid and utilized visual space more effectively. More time would have been used if I had chosen to place one scenario during the first half of the short, then the other afterwards. The viewer would also have had to remember what had occurred during the previous section. If I learned



anything from my classes, it was that you have to go in assuming the audience is “dumb.” You have to simplify everything in order for it to make sense. The split screen made it visually understandable and easier to follow along.

The first scene sets up the rest of the film. More importantly, it illustrates that one small step can alter a future. By the simple act of raising her hand, she could be connected into the film industry and land a dream job. This scene is important for all production students—the concept of networking is extremely important in finding a job after graduation. By taking that risk, the girl was able to be make friends easier—friends that may help her find a job in the future, a friend could start his own company and ask for her to join, or he might recommend her to someone. I felt it was important to stress the networking concept to help girls understand the impact it could have on their futures. No matter how intimidated girls are by the males, it does not hurt to take a risk because it will pay off in the long run.

Similarly, the next scene expresses her passion for film by attending film club. By staying active in film clubs, it expands her résumé making her more appealing to potential employers. While the shy personality may be studying a film, she is not helping herself. Experience is important in this industry. It shows employers that she is knowledgeable and passionate about media and can work with others. Without the college clubs, all she has on her résumé are class projects, which does not hold much weight in the competitive job market. She now has no connections to employers in the working world.

While the risk-taker side is being introduced to her professor’s friend, the shy persona has to find a job the hard way. If she had raised her hand, her confidence would have steadily increased and that would have been portrayed in the interview as it did for her risk-taker side. I tried to reiterate as many times as I could the importance of networking. During my school days,



I was always the last one in the room, and the first one to leave. Establishing a connection with professors could have lead to jobs. Because I did not step out of my comfort zone, I have to find a job the hard way. I am not fully confident in my abilities, and I did not have that extra someone giving input to the employer about my extraordinary skills. Therefore, the character's shy side is the reflection of myself. As Nora stated, directors make films personal. I took her advice literally.

The rest of the film demonstrates the positive consequences regarding her decision to raise her hand. She had a better attitude, better house, and better overall achievement. Her professor's connections lead her to a nice directorial job, whereas her counterpart had opposite results again reiterating the fact that networking is an important part of acquiring a dream media career.

A film technique at the end of the film further exemplifies the power of confidence. By placing the camera low and angled upwards, actors appear bigger and mightier. This technique gave the girl the illusion of being confident while accepting her award. Even though confidence is not a concrete object, the viewer can see confidence because of the camera angle. I did the opposite for her alter ego in the audience; I placed the camera higher, angled down to give the appearance that she is smaller.

Being a director had its complications. My director of photography could not make a full commitment to the project, so I had to scramble to find another. Luckily a friend fit time into her busy schedule to help me. She did not have experience with this position; however, with a theme of the film being encouraging women to take risks, I told her we'd be learning together seeing as how I had never directed before.

An issue arose in the editing room—a bad shot. I had filmed a scene where the actress

put her hand on the car door and opened it, creating a transitional shot between two scenes. However, I only did one take of this shot, which had her hand on the door handle then after a few seconds she opened it. When reviewing the footage and placing in its prospective place, I deemed the shot “weird;” without having her hand move onto the door handle, I felt the flow of the film was interrupted. I had to scrap the shot. Luckily, the shot was not necessary for the plot of the film.

I came across another complication in the editing room: a lack of footage. During the process of filming, trying to get actors out on time due to other time commitments, I forgot to shoot a scene, which would have made the film make more sense. Instead of showing the other girl raise her hand right away, there was supposed to be a shot of the protagonist looking down at her disk contemplating raising her hand. The shot emphasized the importance of taking risks. This missing shot makes the transition into the next scene of walking to the girls room confusing; it would have helped clarify the process of distinguishing the consequences of taking/not taking a risk.

My reaction to the dilemma demonstrated my personal growth. I have been a perfectionist all my life—which is a blessing and a curse. It shows that I am a hard worker and want everything to be the best, but it also encourages my anxiety. Megan (the actress) had done so much for me already and I did not want to burden her with another film shoot. By not calling the actress and trying to establish a time to shoot that one scene, I went out of character. Being a director means all the blame or praise will be placed on you; I have to accept the consequences of my negligence. I had to accept my project as it is.

Furthermore, I realized I should have advertised for a female composer to create music for the film. I had to limit my access to a Soundtrack Pro template. The music repeats itself,



which gets annoying, but without it, the film was boring. The writers and I had dabbled with whether or not to silence the film. I felt sound wasn't needed to push the story along. By having the film silent, it was harder to make sure the story could be told visually without sound backup. Overall, I felt the silence worked well. Silence is used to exaggerate drama; the film is an exaggerated way of showing the outcomes of career paths by one single act of a hand raise.

This is my biggest accomplishment of my college career. Not only is the footage a better quality, but it is the only thing I directed—it was a personal accomplishment. I had to be like the girl in the film and step out of my comfort zone in order to help myself in the long run. It demonstrates my personal growth in accepting responsibility for my actions and the actions of my crew. By being a director, I now have experience in leadership; a quality employers are looking for. Because I did not follow the risk-taker path, I have to find a job on my own and this film will help.

I did not find one specific reason women are not more prevalent in the media industry. Based on statistics and my own theory, women are underrepresented because of different female stereotypes and insecurities. Female personalities seem to affect their projects; they put too much of themselves into a film and take breaks in between projects. Women tend to over-analyze, which makes productions run longer. Insecurities about being a minority inhibit skills. I created the film to show the beginning stage of how women can overcome stereotypes and insecurities. Even though the main lesson from the film can apply to all production students, making the character a female encourages the essential importance of gaining confidence in order to pursue dreams. Until women see themselves as equals in the media industry, others will not.

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